

Food garden at safe park a beacon of hope

Olwethu Ntliziyombi was just 15 years old when her mother abandoned their family and she was left with no other choice than to figure out how to take care of herself and her three younger siblings, as her father had left long before.

Olwethu, who lives in Duncan Village, outside East London, took a job as a security guard while she finished school. In 2016, she started to volunteer at the Duncan Village Safe Park, which is an organisation that was started by the Duncan Village Civic Organisation and the Buffalo City Municipality in 2012 to assist child- and elderly-run homes.

Now aged 26, she is the co-ordinator at the Safe Park. "I love my work. I love helping people because there are so many here who need help," says Olwethu.

The Safe Park, which runs after-school programmes where children can do their homework, started a food garden in 2016 to provide fresh vegetables to the 180 children and elderly people it feeds every day.

Given that there is an unemployment rate of 50% in this small town, the community is always in need of help. "Sometimes, people ask me to help them even when I'm at my shack and I just have to help. It doesn't matter that I'm not at the Safe Park. They need me, so I help," says Olwethu.

Shoprite formed a partnership with the Safe Park at the end of 2018 when it was found that their food garden could be much more productive.

Due to dry conditions, the soil needs a great deal of compost and mulching in order to grow crops more consistently. A water tank, fencing and training were also needed, so Shoprite ensured that all the necessary infrastructure was put in place so that when the training commenced, it would be of benefit.

Trained in permaculture methods, the Duncan Village Safe Park now grows spinach, cabbage, beans, carrots and beetroot, which is being used every day to feed those in need.

"The training has really helped us. We were given seedlings and were taught how to protect the vegetables as they grow. The fence is keeping the chickens and small pigs out of our garden too, so we're very happy that Shoprite is helping us with our food garden because we can help more people now," says Olwethu.

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CAPTION: Olwethu Ntliziyombi (wearing pink) with fellow garden volunteers at the community food garden in Duncan Village Safe Park outside East London.